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ABSTRACT

This report examined the academic review processes at the three Department of Defense service academies, describing how the academies use these processes to review cases of students who have not met academic performance standards. Based on interviews with academy officials and relevant documents, it outlines the review processes in place at the Military Academy, Naval Academy, and Air Force Academy to evaluate cases of academically deficient students and prescribe dispositions for each case. Dispositions range from requiring an individual to repeat a failed course to disenrollment from the academy. Before a student is disenrolled, at least one academic review group evaluates the case. Students may present statements on their behalf during the review process. (MDM)

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Report to Congressional Requesters

April 1995

DOD SERVICE ACADEMIES

Academic Review Processes

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United States
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National Security and
International Affairs Division

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April 5, 1995

The Honorable Strom Thurmond
Chairman
The Honorable Sam Nunn
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Dan Coats
Chairman
The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Personnel
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable John Glenn
United States Senate

In response to a request by the former Chairman of the Senate Committee on Armed Services and the former Chairman of its Subcommittee on Manpower and Personnel, we examined the academic review processes at the three Department of Defense service academies—the Military Academy at West Point, New York; the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland; and the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Our objective was to describe how the academies use these processes to review cases of students who have not met academic performance standards.

Results in Brief

The three service academies have established review processes to evaluate cases of academically deficient students and prescribe dispositions for each case. The processes in place at each academy are generally similar. Dispositions range from requiring an individual to repeat a failed course to disenrollment from the academy. Before a student is academically disenrolled, at least one academic review group evaluates the case. Students may present statements on their behalf during the review process.

Background

The academic programs at the academies are demanding. The core curriculum at each of the academies heavily emphasizes math and science. For example, a first-year student at the Air Force Academy takes chemistry, calculus, general physics, and computer science, in addition to other required courses and electives.

Students receive interim grade reports at prescribed intervals throughout each term to help them monitor their academic performance. To assist students who have difficulty meeting these academic demands, the academies provide a range of academic assistance efforts. A student may receive additional instruction from course instructors or through cadet tutoring and assistance from assigned academic counselors. Even with assistance, some students still do not meet academic performance standards. Total academic disenrollments at the academies for the classes of 1990-94 ranged from a low of 2.4 percent to a high of 8.3 percent (see table 1). Total disenrollments for all causes ranged from 21 percent to 31 percent for these same classes.[1]

Table 1: Academic Disenrollments at the Three Service Academies, Classes of 1990-94

	Military Academy		Naval Academy		Air Force Academy	
Class year	Academically disenrolled	Percent of class	Academically disenrolled	Percent of class	Academically disenrolled	Percent of class
1990	68	5.1	113	8.3	50	3.7
1991	66	4.9	109	8.2	62	4.5
1992	73	5.5	74	5.5	36	2.4
1993	60	4.4	56	4.0	43	3.1
1994	43	3.2	63	5.1	45	3.2

Note: "Percent of class" denotes the total number of academically disenrolled students as a percentage of the total number of students initially enrolled for each class.

Most courses at the academies are graded on a quality point scale, with an "A" worth 4 quality points, a "B" worth 3 quality points, and so on, down to an "F" worth no quality points. At the end of each term, the academies compute a term academic quality point score (the credit-hour weighted average of grades in all courses taken during the term) and a cumulative academic quality point score (the credit-hour weighted average of grades in all courses taken to date) for all students.

[1]Reasons for disenrollment other than academic may include personal resignations, honor and conduct violations, medical separations, and physical fitness and military performance deficiencies.

Criteria for Academic Performance at the Academies

Each academy has prescribed minimum academic performance standards that students must maintain to be in good academic standing. At the Air Force and Military academies, cadets must achieve a grade of "D" or better in all required academic courses. These academies have also established intermediate levels of acceptable term and cumulative academic quality point scores over the 4-year period. Academic deficiency at these academies results from a course grade of "F" or a term or cumulative academic quality point score falling below the required minimum score. The minimum cumulative academic quality point score gradually rises over each of the 4 years at the two academies up to a 2.0 academic quality point average (a "C"), which is required for graduation.

At the Naval Academy, midshipmen are considered academically deficient if they receive more than one "F" in a given semester or an "F" in each of two consecutive semesters. They must also meet minimum semester and cumulative academic quality point scores and graduate with a minimum score of 2.0.

The Academic Review Processes

At the end of each term, each academy convenes special committees to review cases of academically deficient students. While the overall composition of these committees differs somewhat among the academies, all of the committees include academy officers, such as the Dean and the heads of academic departments.

When conducting an academic review, the committee is to consider all pertinent aspects of a student's performance, including academic and medical records, potential for graduation and commissioned service, military and physical program grades and evaluations, and written input from faculty and military officers. While students are not permitted to appear in person before the committee, they may submit in writing matters relevant to their performance.

After deliberations, the committee votes on whether to retain or disenroll each academically deficient student. Decisions for retention are final for that semester, and in these cases, the committee also determines how the deficiency should be remedied. Remedies include repeating a failed course, taking summer academic courses, and being "turned back" to the next lower class. Recommendations for disenrollment are passed on to the Academic Board.

The Academic Board at each academy is composed of top-level academy administrators and faculty, including the Superintendent, the Commandant, and the heads of several academic departments. The boards consider each student's complete record, relying on the same types of information that the committees considered. After deliberation, the boards make their determinations of student academic deficiencies and decide the appropriate disposition of each case, based on their appraisal of the individual student's potential to complete the academic program and to become a commissioned officer. A simple majority vote is required for board decisions.

At the Military Academy, when the committee finds a cadet to be deficient, the case is forwarded for review by the Academic Board. A cadet recommended for separation may submit a written request for reconsideration. The board's recommendation is forwarded either to the Superintendent or the Secretary of the Army, depending on the class and prior-service status of the cadet.

At the Air Force Academy, a student found to be academically deficient may request that the academic review committee reconsider the decision before forwarding it to the Dean for the next level of review. Following the Dean's review, the case is forwarded to the Superintendent, who may refer the case to the Academy Board for advice. The Air Force Academy Superintendent ordinarily makes the final decision. In disputed cases affecting cadets in their final 2 years who have incurred active duty service requirements, the Secretary of the Air Force makes the final determination.

At the Naval Academy, a student found to be academically deficient may also request reconsideration. However, the Naval Academy does not have any other level of review beyond that of the Academic Board.

Scope and Methodology

We interviewed academy officials at the three service academies and reviewed documents relevant to their academic review processes. We performed our review at the Military Academy; the Naval Academy; and the Air Force Academy. We conducted our review between October 1994 and January 1995 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Officials of the service academies and the Department of Defense reviewed a draft of this report, and their informal comments have been incorporated where appropriate.

If you or your staff have any questions, please call me at (202) 512-5140. Major contributors to this report were William E. Beusse and Rudolfo G. Payan.

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Director, Military Operations
and Capabilities Issues

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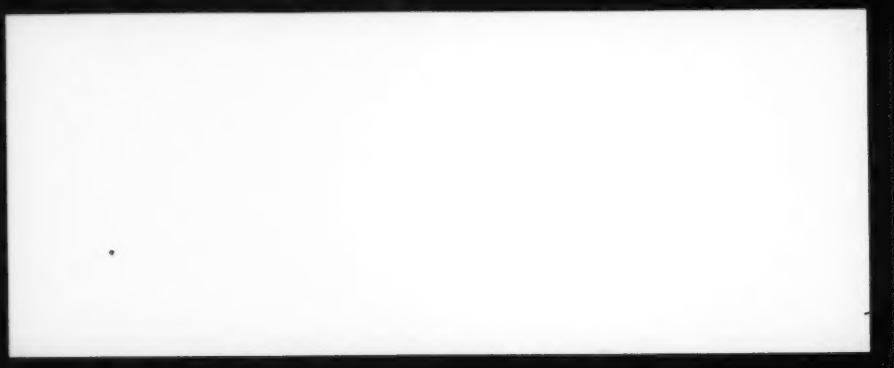

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